MANCHESTER COLLEGE, OXFORD.

An Address

DELIVERED BY THE

REV. W. E. ADDIS, M.A.,

ON THE OCCASION OF THE

OPENING OF THE COLLEGE,

17th OCTOBER, 1899.

The College adheres to its original principle of freely imparting Theological knowledge without insisting on the adoption of particular Theological doctrines.

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ADDRESS.

WELL-NIGH forty years ago, one of the most accomplished scholars and one of the best men that ever adorned this or any other University was finishing a sermon, to be preached on the following Sunday at St. Mary's. As a pupil entered his room, he put the manuscript aside, and said, with a sigh, "Well, I hope this is true, for it certainly is not new." So he spoke with characteristic modesty, and I should like to shelter myself under the same apologetic form, not out of modesty but because I am compelled to bespeak your patience and your indulgent judgment. I shall say nothing new, because I have nothing new to say; and if you ask me why in that case I venture to address you at all, my answer is that it seemed ungracious to decline the invitation with which I was honoured, and also that on an occasion like this, as another year of theological study begins, it may not be by any means useless to collect a few familiar truths and to urge them on your attention. Look steadily to the land that lies before you; get some clear idea of the path you have to take; brace yourselves for the dangers and toil and monotony of the journey; change the common-places which I utter, so far as your judgment approves them, into wise, practical and steadfast resolutions. Then the wood—dry without—will show that it retains the sap of life within; it will strike root and bear fruit, and the half-hour we spend together will not pass in vain. But before we go further, we must begin with a clear notion of the things we are to speak and think about. They are briefly these. I propose to consider the nature of genuine knowledge and the method of acquiring it. After that

I shall say a little on the effect of study as a mental and moral discipline, and on the hopes with which we enter on our common life in the hall of residence.

First, then, as to the nature of knowledge, the tests by which we are to distinguish the precious metal from spurious imitations. We need to remind ourselves that true knowledge is precise and exact; the ideal scholar is one who will refrain absolutely from use of words till he has assured himself by vigorous self-examination that he thoroughly understands their meaning. He is content to know a little well, and not till he has mastered that little, will he suffer himself to take another part of the subject in hand. He learns the necessity of learned ignorance, and to a thousand interesting and important questions he answers, "I don't know." He is independent, though he is modest; he tries to see for himself, though he accepts most thankfully the advice of wiser and more experienced persons, when they tell him where to look and how, and point out many a thing which, but for their direction, he would never have noticed or even dreamt of. Still he will not be the slave of great names. He does not forget that there is a fashion in opinion just as there is a fashion in dress, and he brings all theory to the test of fact and careful inference from fact. Moreover, he fixes great principles in his memory, so that they shall never be forgotten, or shall at least remain latent in the mind and admit of easy revival. This is no impossible task; on the contrary, it is within the reach of every one among you, and only requires honest, continuous, well-directed effort. It is indeed worse than useless to have a smattering of many sciences. The danger is imminent at this day, when all the gates of knowledge are opened wide; it is specially imminent in a great University which offers opportunity for studying all the chief branches of art and science. Even that access to books, which in your case is practically unlimited, has its perils as well as its advantages. "I believe," says Sir Walter Scott, "one reason

why such numerous instances of erudition occur among the lower ranks is that, with the same powers of mind, the poor student is limited to a narrow circle for indulging his passion for books, and must necessarily make himself master of the few he possesses before he can acquire more." (*Waverley*, ch. iii.). It is very easy, then, for a young man to waste his time in strenuous and eager idleness, to hear about a vast variety of subjects without seriously studying, let alone mastering, any one of them: πόλλ' ἠπίστατο ἔργα, κακῶς δ' ἠπίστατο πάντα. But on the other hand we must not for a moment dream of undervaluing knowledge because it is elementary. A boy who has read one book of Cæsar's Commentaries and is able to translate exactly, to parse the words, to explain why, *e.g.*, in certain cases the subjunctive is used instead of the indicative, has already laid the firm foundation of all Latin scholarship; he is a real scholar, though not of course an advanced one. So, though a young man may read volume upon volume concerning Greek literature to no profit, he has gained much who has read one of the easier Greek plays, one book of Xenophon or Homer, accounting for every particle, and able to give the precise force of each word compounded with a preposition. It would be useless to multiply instances. You all know the difference between a dim remembrance of English history, and a precise knowledge of the changes which the constitution of this realm has undergone at the great turning points of its history. You will readily see that such knowledge may be thorough and satisfactory, though a thousand matters of detail are unknown. Perhaps you may think that the instances given are dry, that they belong to the husk of knowledge. But we cannot reach the kernel till we are able to crack the nut, or, to drop metaphor, we cannot understand the general sense of an author till we thoroughly comprehend the words he uses and the construction of his sentences. This is true all the more in proportion to the greatness of the author studied. A man of

genius, we may be very sure, does not fling about words at random, and is careful to clothe noble thoughts in noble form. The young theologian can plead no exemption from this kind of patient labour. How, for example, can he enter into the spirit of St. Paul's Epistles without studying the language in which the Apostle wrote as it existed in St. Paul's time, and in the circle within which the Apostle lived and moved? This question, of course, refers to theological study. Purity and simplicity of heart are the conditions for the religious study of Holy Scripture, and the Holy Spirit Himself leads the willing heart into all truth. But there is good sense in the old adage, "Bonus grammaticus bonus theologus," and the divines of the English Church—men like Lightfoot or Westcott in our own day—have laboured with success in theological learning because their training in grammatical scholarship has been so thorough and so sound. Besides this, the study of language is not dry when it is conducted on rational principles. It is no mere exercise of memory; rather it is a study of human thought finding its utterance in speech. It is the happiness of our time that even elementary books on grammar and history are written by distinguished men, and are conceived in a philosophical spirit; that they exhibit not only facts, but also the reason for the facts and their importance. We should then question ourselves day by day to discover what amount of knowledge we really have grasped and secured. We should see to it that our attention is active, not merely the passive attention to a lecturer. Here, perhaps, I may be allowed to remark by the way, that it is far better to set oneself a definite quantity to be learned than to fix the daily portion of time to be spent in study. One half-hour of concentrated attention, if it enables us to understand and remember a few lines of the author we are studying, is manifestly clear gain. Ten or twelve hours during which we think we are studying, may end in mere confusion and bewilderment and helpless weariness. It is not enough to say of hours so spent

that they are useless. They are positively hurtful, because they end in discouragement and distaste for study, and beget the fatal habit of listless dreaming. We ought always to keep, if we can, a vigorous mind in a vigorous body, and to shut the book when the power of close attention really fails us.

Further, the student should do his best, though his best will never reach perfect success, to distinguish, to exercise discriminating judgment in the object-matter of his study. No doubt, to a large extent the classes which you attend are fixed for you, but this has little or nothing to do with the discrimination to which I refer. For example, we must always bear in mind, and we can scarcely be too careful in doing so, the difference between ascertained fact and mere hypothesis. Hypothesis, even when it does not rise above a low degree of probability, may be exceedingly serviceable, because it can at least furnish a basis for argument. We must, however, begin with facts known and admitted ; they are the common ground on which all differences between contending schools must be fought out and settled. We have to acquaint ourselves with these, adding where we can facts newly discovered and proven, even if they be not yet generally recognised as such. On these facts, as on a firm foundation, all sure results are to be built up ; only so far as it offers a likely explanation of the facts can hypothesis have any value whatsoever. Nor must we forget that the most likely of existing hypotheses is not on that account necessarily true, and remains still in a plane altogether different from that of attested fact. Recollection of these obvious truths would save us from servile adherence to the newest modes in criticism, and it would also have saved some from the trouble of writing, and others, to whom greater consideration is due, the trouble of reading learned works, whether on the conservative or the progressive side, in which conjecture is piled upon conjecture, in which the merest guess is hazarded in one page, and then, a few pages further on, is

passed off as proved fact and treated as an apology for one theory more.

Nor is it enough to distinguish fact from mere hypothesis: it is just as necessary to understand the relative importance of diverse facts. Let us suppose, for example, that we can fix with absolute precision the date at which an author wrote, and determine, beyond all possibility of doubt, which among the works attributed to him are really his. Such knowledge may be of very high value, and it may also be of scarcely any value at all. We must, of course, take for granted that the author in question has written what is worth reading either in itself, or because it throws light on the age in which the writer lived and the course of historical development. That being granted, our main endeavour must be to acquaint ourselves with the words and thoughts of the book we have to study. The criticism which discloses the time and the manner of its writing may do us excellent service. It is indeed one condition for entering thoroughly into the meaning and spirit of the work we study. Even the loftiest genius is the child of his own time, though he is also the father of ideas which belong to the time that was still to come. We ought, therefore, so far as possible, to imagine him in his true environment, to read him in the light of his own day, to comprehend the work he did and the tools with which he did it. Thus criticism is the handmaid of interpretation; it is our safeguard against the anachronism of reading, *e.g.*, the theology of St. Augustine into the Epistles of St. Paul, or of St. Athanasius into the Gospel of St. John. Only we must beware of mistaking criticism for the end, whereas it never can be more than a means to the end. Can you imagine anything more deplorable than the case of a student who had a minute familiarity with all the theories that had been held on the origin of the Homeric poems, while all the time he had scant acquaintance with the tale of Troy divine, remained almost dead to the living picture of that

distant age, to the noble simplicity, directness, rapidity of the style, was never melted into pity for Andromache or Priam, or rejoiced with Achilles in the brief span of his glorious youth. Surely it is a thousand times better to know Shakespeare as many a man did in the past generation, by reading the plays till he knew much by heart and had an intelligent enthusiasm for Shakespeare's genius, than to be able, without any such familiarity, to dilate *ad nauseam* on weak endings and strong endings, stopped and unstopped lines, the authentic and unauthentic positions of Henry VIII., the possible interpolations in Macbeth, the chronology of the dramas. These things no doubt deserve attention, but they are not the weightier matters of Shakespearian study: nay, they are mere jargon, unless they help us to trace the growth of Shakespeare's mind and Shakespeare's art. Now I am persuaded that no class of men need this warning more than theological students. There is a real danger of knowing, very often in a confused way, always in an unsatisfactory way, a great deal that has been said in Germany and elsewhere about the Bible, while we remain ignorant of the Bible itself. How will such study help you in that work of the ministry for which you are preparing? Either the Bible is not worth reading, and in that case we may well be excused if we decline to trouble ourselves about the dates and mode of its composition, or it is worth study, and then your duty is to study it with enthusiastic devotion, and to kindle, when the opportunity is given you, in the hearts of others, the fire which already burns in your own hearts. I cannot, at present, enter on the religious aspects of Biblical study. I will only remark that here the question is, "What can the Bible do to promote the Christian life in the souls of men and in the world?" Suppose, for the sake of argument (and I, of course, make this supposition only for the sake of argument), that there are other books, or collections of books, equally good—what of that? The first and chief question

is, "How can I make the Bible serve myself and others?" A man's loyalty to his friends is founded on the love and gratitude due to them, not upon an abstract theory that nobody else has friends equally good or wise.

There is another maxim, another kind of discrimination, which follows naturally from that which has just been said. There is a great gulf fixed between books bad or indifferent and books which are good, and there is also a most vital distinction to be made between the books which are good and that very small number of those which are the best, the great masterpieces of all literature. Now young men are strongly attracted by the literature of their own day. This is right and just. The serious and the lighter literature of our own day comes home with especial force to us, because it interprets our own thoughts and deals with the conditions under which we are to live. Men have always felt the charm of novelty and freshness, for even Homer remarks that the minstrel cannot be blamed for choosing his theme from the great events that were still recent, since, he says, men most applaud the song that is newest. All this may be freely granted; nay, we may add that we, who have long ceased to be young, should renew our youth by sympathetic reading of some at least among the books which occupy the minds of younger persons. Nevertheless, it is the greatest books which merit close and constant study till we learn to know and love them. The world has pronounced judgment upon them, and that judgment seldom if ever errs when it lasts from age to age. Moreover, the Classics of any language are the books which have proved their vitality, while books of inferior merit have died and have been forgotten. To that judgment we rightly defer, at least in the first instance. We are not, of course, to utter words of admiration which to us are mere cant, because we repeat them like parrots, without real feeling. Still, it is well worth our while to try whether we cannot find in the

greatest writers what others better qualified to judge have ever found. To do so will cost us time and trouble. It is no easy matter to appreciate a play of Shakespeare, for the simple reason that there is so much to understand, so much in the single parts, so much in the way these parts are fused by power of creative genius into one artistic whole. But the study of a great work over and over again becomes more and more fascinating, more and more profitable. Such books do great things for us. They enlarge our horizon; they help us to grow tolerant and wise; they fill us with noble thoughts and interpret life for us. Then, as years advance, the experience of our own life in turn interprets them and makes them living counsellors and friends. He who sets this hope before him will welcome any information which will direct him in his study of great literature, but he will never suffer a history of literature to replace the literature itself, or allow the most learned notes to relieve him from the prime necessity of interpreting a great author by himself.

Once more, our studies may and ought to be connected; and we may reasonably rejoice in this fact, seeing how greatly it helps our memory and promotes our interest in our studies. Also by remembering this we escape the danger of neglecting one study in the supposed interests of another, and of attempting to become specialists in vain, because we make the attempt too soon. A medical man may in the end devote himself to the special study of the eye or the ear or the heart, but he is not allowed to do so till he has shown his general knowledge of medicine and surgery. The secular studies which you have pursued in years past must be held in memory, and, if possible, carried further; for how can you study the history of Israel apart from that of the Assyrian, Babylonian, Persian empires, and of Alexander and his successors? How can you separate church history from the secular history of any one period? It is obvious that you cannot read the Greek Testament, unless you have some acquaintance

with the grammar and history of the Greek language. The principles of criticism are identical whether they be applied to Herodotus or to the Books of Samuel; and if you have mastered Professor Jebb's brief introduction to the study of Homer, you have furnished yourself with an admirable model for the study of Old Testament criticism. And as your studies at school and college in the past are in a sense one with your study of theology, so, too, all your studies here are knit closely and indissolubly together. It may seem a long cry from philosophy to the grammar of the New Testament; yet all fruitful study of language is in reality, as has been already said, a study of human thought, and such books as Goodwin's Greek "Moods and Tenses," or Driver's "Hebrew Tenses," are eminently philosophical. Again, the philosopher cannot content himself with abstract reasoning; he has to consider the thought of God as it has been evolved in the general history of mankind, in Holy Scripture, in the doctrines of the Catholic Church and of the Reformation. We may take another instance from the study of economic science within these walls. You can apply its principles most usefully to the study of the Hebrew prophets. They dealt with a time when the Phœnician trade added greatly to the wealth of a few, and enabled them to enslave the peasant proprietors, who were impoverished by war with their northern neighbours. Or turn to the New Testament and the history of the early church. There, too, you will find the early Christians face to face with conditions which resulted in a contrast of great poverty and great wealth; in short in a time of social strain which presents important points of likeness to the difficulties of our own generation. True, we can only with the utmost caution reason from one period to another. True, history never really repeats itself. Nevertheless the principles are identical, and the more clearly we apprehend this identity of principle, the more carefully shall we make allowance for difference in the subject-matter to which these principles are applied.

But it is time to pass to the educative effect of study, though here, having already detained you so long, I must content myself with a few words. You do not need to be told, though you may often need to be reminded, that study is intended to draw out and develop the hidden powers of the mind. We may pore over books and acquire much knowledge, but all this fails of its purpose unless it make us more zealous for accuracy, which is but another name for truth. Depend upon it that such a habit of mind will not fail to tell upon our work as ministers. Business men are aware that accuracy is the condition of their own success, and they are not at a loss to discover accuracy, or the lack of it, in others. A man's words tell when he is trained to avoid exaggeration, slipshod methods, the pretence of knowing what he does not know, and pedantic ostentation of the little knowledge he has. Knowledge also should teach us the true perspective, the relative importance, of truth. If we are patient, we shall learn the meaning and the essential truths of doctrines which we cannot perhaps accept without some reserve. And, therefore, we shall not make the fatal mistake of indulging to our own intellectual and moral hurt in acrid and arid controversy. Truth, says the proverb, stands on two legs, though that false idol, which the fanatic mistakes for truth, always stands on one leg only. Reading, too, should enlarge our sympathies and make our conversation interesting, not, of course, that we are to be always discussing learned subjects, but because we have much matter of general interest at our command, and because we are training ourselves in the power of expression. Further, familiarity with great writers should surely teach us good taste; and you will, perhaps, let me add that a sense of the ridiculous is among the most valuable gifts which we can derive from literature. I do not forget that it is born with a man. Still most of us have it in some faint degree. And we have to cultivate the germ and foster it, in order that we may not make

ourselves more ridiculous than need be. Nor must we forget that there is a more serious side in a studious life. We cannot learn without much self-denial and much self-restraint. Day by day we have to set ourselves tasks which must often be irksome and more or less against the grain. There are, for teacher and for taught, difficulties which cannot be overcome save by dogged resolution. This discipline, this wholesome asceticism, which all study worthy of the name involves, reacts upon the moral character. Surely it should make us modest, faithful, manly, real. There have been good soldiers of Christ who fought the good fight with weapons which were not intellectual, and who made small use of books. But no such course is open to us. We are here to study; to us neglect of study is neglect of duty, and if we do not mind our book, then we are deceiving ourselves, and our religion is vain.

Lastly, I must not close these remarks without some reference to that collegiate life which we now possess in its fulness. Just think for a moment how much is implied in a common table. "God," says an eminent writer, whose words used to be uttered with thrilling power in this University, and who held the hearts of men in his hand, as no one had ever done before, as no one has ever done since, "God has given us 'wine that maketh glad the heart of man, and oil to make him a cheerful countenance, and bread to strengthen man's heart.' And these good gifts, by which our life is strengthened, send the soul out of itself in search of sympathy and fellowship; they end not in themselves, nor can be enjoyed in solitude; they create and convey and blend with social feelings; they are means and tokens of mutual good-will and kindness; or, to speak more religiously, they are of a sacramental character. They are intended by being partaken in common to open our hearts towards each other in love; and this being the case, we may judge how fearful is the abuse of God's gifts in riot or sensuality, for it is in some

sort a profanation of a divine ordinance, a sacrilege."* These beautiful and solemn words may help us to see what the common meal may do for us, and suggest thoughts which have their application to every side of that common life which now binds you so closely together. Small as your society is, it will give you opportunity enough of cultivating that spirit of wise toleration which makes little account of differences in antecedents or outward circumstance, that kindly feeling which makes men one in spite of differences in taste or opinion or habits. We enter on this new college year with the hope that the *esprit de corps* which has always been strong among you may grow stronger than ever, and prove the utter death of selfishness and vulgarity, and of that sensitive vanity which makes a man querulous and egotistical, a torment to himself and others. Not one of you but can do much, very much, to maintain the general credit and to cement the social fabric. I trust also that you will make friends outside of our own precincts, and learn something of life and thought elsewhere. Depend upon it, the more men of different thoughts can be brought together with mutual goodwill and respect, the better; provided, of course, we do not suffer society to rob us of time for study. And from this intercourse you may bear with you into your future life two inestimable benefits. You may form one or two friendships which will be a joy and a blessing to you in after years, and you may begin here to know something of men and of the way to deal with them. It is thought by some that Christian ministers should be leaders and guides in matters of social reform. There is no need to discuss the worth of this opinion, though it will, I suppose, be admitted that most of us cannot expect to do much in such ambitious ways. But all ministers have to deal with the

* "Newman's Sermons on Subjects of the Day," p. 33. I may perhaps be allowed to call the attention of young men to the same author's "Lectures on University Subjects" as an admirable and fascinating introduction to University studies.

men and women of their own congregations; they are pastors, and should never degenerate into mere preachers. They have to comfort and encourage; they have to take an interest in the affairs of others, an interest which is kindly but never intrusive; they have to attract and direct the young; sometimes they have to make peace; always they have to show an example of patience, forbearance, tact and common sense. Well, for this great work college life furnishes an excellent introduction, while the solitary student is at manifest disadvantage And so we go forth to our labour, anxious to learn, anxious to help each other, mistrusting ourselves and trusting God.